

For Immediate Release

March 19, 2004

Panel studying animal shelter and spay and neuter program releases study today

Chattanooga, TN— This afternoon at 1:30 p.m. the panel appointed by Mayor Bob Corker to study the need for a new animal shelter and spay and neuter program will release their findings.

In October of 2003, the Chattanooga City Council asked Mayor Bob Corker's administration to formally review both issues and the Mayor named David Eichenthal, City Finance Officer and Director of the Office of Performance Review to work with a committee to develop workable solutions to the animal control and care problem in the City. In November, the City announced the creation of a seven member working group. In addition to Mr. Eichenthal, the members of the Working Group are

- Kenardo Curry, Administrator of the Department of Neighborhood Services
- Mike Glenn, Lieutenant and Acting Manager, Chattanooga Animal Services
- Lisa Williams, a member of the City Council Euthanasia Reduction Task Force and a member of the Chattanooga Alliance for Animals
- Guy Bilyeu, Executive Director, Humane Educational Society
- Professor Stephanie Bellar, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
- Pete Cooper, President, Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga

The 7 member panel, chaired by Mr. Eichenthal, will review their findings and recommendations during a 1:30 p.m. media conference this afternoon in the lobby of City Hall. All media are invited to attend.

For more information, contact Todd Womack, Communications Director, at 423-757-5168.

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Summary findings of Animal Service Task Force

GOALS

- Reduce the stray animal population in the City of Chattanooga

- Provide for shelter for stray animals and animals in custodial care of the of the City in a well maintained and well run facility
- Reduce the use of euthanasia as a means of controlling the animal population
- Minimize the cost burden on the General Fund of the City of Chattanooga

FINDINGS

1. Changes in the rate of impoundment can have a direct impact on the capacity needs of the shelter system. Shelter capacity has a direct effect on euthanasia rates. Spay and neuter rates affect impoundment. Adoptions affect shelter capacity and euthanasia rates.

2. The City's contract with HES is based on impoundment - but lacks specific incentives for spay and neuter or adoption. The City's decision to implement the 1998 Task Force's recommendation to expand enforcement but ignore its recommendation for a new shelter directly contributed to the current problem.

3. While some have suggested that the City should be willing to spend more on animal care and control, the problem really lies with how resources devoted to the problem are allocated. **Because of decisions related to the staffing of Animal Services and the structure of the City's contract with HES, City residents currently spend more than twice as much as Hamilton County residents for animal control and shelter.**

4. In December 2003 and January 2004, Animal Services responded to 695 and 698 calls respectively. Calls appear to be geographically concentrated as well. In January 2004, eight of the City's 31 police zones had thirty or more calls and together accounted for 49.3% of all Animal Services calls citywide.

5. **In 2002, Chattanooga Animal Services impounded 8,514 animals -- more animals per capita than all but one of the eleven benchmark jurisdictions.** In fact, Chattanooga's impound rate was actually 50% higher than the next highest jurisdiction. While impoundments in Chattanooga in 2003 declined by 32%, Chattanooga's impoundment rate still would have been higher than the 2002 impoundment rates in all but one of the benchmark jurisdictions.

6. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) recommends one animal service officer per 18,000 residents. In Chattanooga, this would require nine animal control officers - one *less* than existing staff levels. Moreover, none of the benchmark jurisdictions came anywhere close to ICMA's staffing recommendations. **Of the benchmark jurisdictions, Chattanooga had the most animal control officers per capita of any jurisdiction.**

7. While HES no longer provides animal control services for the City, Chattanooga accounts for 48% of government appropriations to HES.

8. Until recently, the principal means of managing animal population at the HES shelter was euthanasia. **While the national euthanasia rate is 60%, HES had often reached euthanasia rates of 80% or more.** Since August 2003, however, HES's euthanasia rate has decreased to nearly 55%. With some changes in space usage and a decline in stray animal impoundments by the City of Chattanooga, the HES has been able to reduce its space-related euthanasia from 61% to 19%.

9. Spay and neuter programs are the single most important means of reducing the stray animal population. Despite the high level of investment in animal care and control in Chattanooga, very little in public funds have been invested in spay and neuter programs as a long term solution to the animal control program. While there is no direct local government investment in spay/neuter programs, at least a half dozen not for profits do provide low to no cost spay or neuter operations in Chattanooga and Hamilton County.

10. The City Code provides for an annual \$5 license fee for all dogs and cats over the age of three months: owners of unneutered animals are required to pay a \$20 surcharge. Only 6.4% of pets are estimated to be licensed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The City should work with animal advocates and local philanthropists to create a new Trust for Animal Care and Control (TACC). TACC would be governed by a board of funders and advocates and would be charged with the responsibility of raising \$4.5 million^[cm1] for animal care and control. While these funds would largely go to the construction of a new shelter, at least \$1 million would likely be available to provide funding for facility maintenance and - more importantly - for public education and spay and neuter programs, especially those targeted at low income residents.

2. The design for the new shelter should be user-friendly, designed specifically to attract both volunteers and individuals interested in adoption of animals. At the same time, modern shelter design schemes should be incorporated to minimize maintenance, cleaning and other operational costs. The proposed shelter should probably be in the range of 15,000 to 20,000 square feet - providing adequate capacity for use not only by the City, but by the County and other localities if they chose to contract for its use. In addition, the shelter should be designed to incorporate an adjacent dog park and open space adequate for animal exercise.

3. Two City owned sites should be considered for the shelter: Portland Park and the DuPont site.

4. Based on a proposed square footage of 20,000 sq. ft. and an average per square foot cost for new shelters of \$160, a new facility could cost as much as \$3.2 million. Less costly options, however, should be considered.

Escambia County, Florida's new \$1.3 million shelter is an interesting model. The 17,000 square foot shelter was built in 1996 and it has most, if not all, of the necessary components to a shelter identified above.

5. **The City should continue to contract out the operation of the animal shelter.** The shelter operations contract can be structured to create specific performance incentives. By creating a shelter that is independently owned, the City will - for the first time - have a real ability to replace a shelter operator who is not performing. **The key to effective operation of the shelter is not City ownership, it is independent ownership and City control.**

6. **By reducing total staff for Animal Services to nine - the level recommended by ICMA, and a staffing level still greater than benchmark cities - the City would save approximately \$150,000 a year.** Savings from Animal Services should be invested in a joint effort with TACC focused on public education and low cost or free spay and neuter initiatives for low income residents.

7. **The effectiveness of Animal Services would also be greatly enhanced by moving Animal Services out of the Police Department and having it report to the Administrator of the Department of Neighborhood Services.** DNS would be responsible for enforcement, spay and neuter initiatives and increased efforts to collect license fees.

8. As the 1998 Task Force Report noted, a comprehensive approach to animal control also requires toughening and streamlining the City Code provisions related to animal control. The City Council should consider several measures designed to further reduce the stray pet population in Chattanooga:

- Require all animals being reclaimed by owners from the shelter be spayed and neutered.
- Owners who allow their pets to become stray should be charged an impound fee that reflects the actual cost of impoundment and shelter.
- Advertising for unlicensed "puppy mills" with media outlets in the City limits should be barred.

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